

SOME THOUGHTS ON MY "EVOLVING" GARDEN IN WINTER

by Ronnie Brancazio



So far, we've made it through December and January, February is mercifully short (even though this is a leap year), and the days are getting noticeably longer. A few things start popping up in the yard in March, and by April Spring is really happening! So - we'll get there!

Meanwhile, here's my FEBRUARY UPDATE:

As I mentioned earlier, I took the big step of having a garden team do a drastic pruning and clearing of my small property, so that I can see what's what and get a fresh start. It has given me an immense sense of relief, because I was feeling truly overwhelmed and unable to keep things under control. So that's one very good thing. Not so good is that with everything cleared down to the ground, I am not providing safe harbor for wintering pollinators, so I won't let that happen again. Even worse from a "housekeeping" perspective, is that after every rain or snow the bare ground turns to mud, and my dog Riva goes for her merry romp then runs inside and races on EVERY floor and piece of furniture before the "Towel Squad" (me) can get to her!

In fact, her favorite route includes a short path from the grass/paver area to



the corner of the fence, where she barks to chase away buses, trucks, and passers-by! She does this so often that she has dug a trench about 6" deep which fills with rainwater - need I say more? I decided to solve this problem with some creative garden design hardscape, and ordered a 5' long cedar

wood bridge to place over the trench. It just arrived in a suspiciously flat box and I opened it to find, not an assembled bridge, but a box filled with - lots of wooden planks! "Some assembly required!" Yikes! The side-rails are assembled, but not the bridge floor itself. So there go a few weekends! It WILL be a charming addition though - or else!

The next major project following the big clearing-out is the long, narrow garden along my driveway, which I've also mentioned to you. After some thought and research, I've decided that I do want to create a (mostly) NATIVE PLANT border, based largely on the teachings of Doug Tallamy, which we've started highlighting at our LIHS meetings. As you will see on the Exhibition Table at the February meeting, Doug's books include excellent charts listing virtually all the native shrubs, trees, and perennials for our area, along with indications of how valuable they are to the regional ecology. I'm going to do my best to select and purchase an assortment of low-growing shrubs and long-flowering perennials based on these charts. One question I'm still exploring is whether some of the Native Cultivars are as valuable as the Native Species, because they do tend to flower for longer periods, and have other improved features. The reason I said "mostly" natives is that the border still has some beloved perennials which I've had for some time and don't want to remove. These include a Shasta Daisy, some Daylilies, and quite a few phlox, coreopsis, and Rudbeckia cultivars that I hope will earn their keep. One very nice aspect of this border is that it's very visible to passers-by, of which I have many (being on a busy street). I will therefore put a small sign at the sidewalk end of the planting which briefly describes the purpose of the plants. Our mission IS EDUCATION AND OUTREACH after all!



Another benefit of the BIG CLEANUP is that it has exposed empty areas in the yard which cry out for more projects, and thus more purchases! I realized I have room for one or two more flowering shrubs, and have my eye on crepe myrtle and mountain laurel. This area is inside the fence, and I'm allowing myself to enjoy some plants that are perhaps not so useful - but are not invasive. I think we all need to make that compromise, since there are so many gorgeous growing things that we MUST HAVE, regardless!

So that's what I'm up to. I hope you are all using your time well to plan and dream and look forward to spring!